

JUAN PABLO VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN (1748–1798)
LETTER TO THE SPANISH AMERICANS (1799)

The discovery of so great a portion of the earth is, and ever will be, to mankind, the most memorable event in their annals; but, to us who are its inhabitants, and to our descendants, it is an object of the greatest importance. The New World is our country; its history is ours; and . . . duty and interest oblige us to examine our present situation . . .

Our ancestors, in removing themselves to an immense distance from their native country, and in renouncing the support that belonged to them, as well as the protection which could no longer succour them in regions as distant as unknown; our ancestors, I say, in this state of natural independence, ventured to procure for themselves a new subsistence, by the most excessive fatigues, with the greatest dangers, and at their own expense.

What a difference between this temporary situation of the Spaniards, and ours – which continues three centuries! Deprived of all the advantages of government, we have experienced from it only the most horrible disorders and the greatest vices; without the hope of ever obtaining, either an immediate protection, or a prompt justice, at the distance of from two to three thousands leagues, without the resource of objecting to them, we have been made the victims of the pride, the injustice, and the rapacity of ministers, as greedy at least as the favourites of Charles the V.

To fill the measure of our humiliating slavery, indigence, covetousness and ambition, have always furnished to Spain, a host of adventurers ready to hurry to America; they arrive there determined to repay themselves amply, with our substance, for that which they have advanced to obtain their employments . . .

Three whole centuries, during which this government has, without interruption, held the same conduct with regard to us, afford complete proof of a mediated plan, to sacrifice us [e]ntirely to the interests and the convenience of Spain; but above all to the passions of her ministers.

We have seen the ingratitude, the injustice, and the tyranny with which the Spanish government oppressed us from the foundation of our colonies, that is to say, when it was very far from possessing the absolute and arbitrary power to which it has since arrived; now that it knows no other rules than its will, and that it is accustomed to consider our property as an estate which belongs to it, all its study consists in increasing it at our expense, in always giving the colour of utility to the mother country, to the infamous sacrifice of all our rights and of our dearest interests.

Is it only after three centuries, that the possessions of the New World, our country, is our due, and that we ought to hear of the hope of becoming equal to the Spaniards of Europe? And why, and by what title, should we be deprived of this equality?

Taken from Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, *Letter to the Spanish Americans* (Rhode Island: John Carter Brown Library, 2002), 62–64, 72, 77–78, 80–81, 85.